

Timely talk tackles TAF for farmers

ALI TOCKER Last updated 08:01 26/06/2012

Annual conference covers today's challenges for Fed Farmers' members, writes Ali Tocker.



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Farmers will hear from a global expert on co-operatives, critical of Fonterra's Trading Among Farmers proposals, at Federated Farmers' national conference in Auckland this week.

The farmer group's president, Bruce Wills, said the talk by Dr Onno van Bekkum was timely, given yesterday's farmer-shareholder votes on the dairy co-operative's TAF proposals.

Van Bekkum, of The Netherlands, has worked as a consultant for a range of co-operatives including Fonterra, Rabobank and Dairy Farmers of Britain.

A New Zealand anti-TAF lobby group led by Leonie Guiney, the Fonterra Farmers Protecting Our Co-op group, commissioned Van Bekkum to do a due diligence on TAF from a co-operative perspective.

In his report, he said the TAF proposal "strikes an axe in the co-operative roots of Fonterra".

"By denying members access to the equity built up collectively in Fonterra for many years, TAF cuts out the heart from the co-operative ... A co-operative encouraging its members to sell shares so external investors may have their bit of the cake – that is unprecedented and anti-co-operative," he wrote.

Van Bekkum is the chief executive of a "one-man" organisation launched in January 2010 to promote an "interactive learning environment for co-operative leaders".

Van Bekkum has a PhD in economics, and his areas of interest in co-operatives include ownership and capitalisation, business strategy and leadership.

The Federated Farmers conference runs from Wednesday to Friday this week at the Crowne Plaza

Wills said highlights on the agenda would include briefings from Finance Minister Bill English, Primary Industries Minister David Carter and Opposition Leader David Shearer.

Wills will share his experiences from meeting with global agricultural leaders at the World Farmers Organisation general assembly in Rome, and Federated Farmers chief executive Conor English will share relevant information for New Zealand farming from the Rio+20 Earth Summit.

Other topics will include animal welfare and the animal welfare compliance framework, and farm environmental management. Updates will be given on the Land and Water Forum and the success to the Dairying and Clean Streams Accord, as well as a "green outlook" for primary industries. Transpower's line strategy and agricultural aviation will also be discussed.

In a new feature, interactive couch sessions will be held on three hot topics – foreign ownership, the environment and local government. Experts and commentators taking part will include Tony Bouchi from Save Our Farms, KPMG business advisory partner Tim White, Waikato University agribusiness professor Dr Jacqueline Rowarth, AgKnowledge director Dr Doug Edmeades and local government representatives.

Winners in the Federated Farmers National Awards will be announced on Thursday, including agri business person and agri personality of the year.

"Central to this great evening is the Vodafone cream of the crop awards, where we assemble almost all of agriculture's major award winners for the past 12 months. It is a huge undertaking but central to us celebrating agriculture's continued success," Wills said.

Federated Farmers' board elections will take place on Friday.

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